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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

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NSC FOR NEA STAFF

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HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Secretary Rice to Israel, West Bank, March 29-31, 2008

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Key stories in the media:

Ha'aretz (lead story) and other media reported that on Sunday
Secretary Rice vowed that the U.S. will be more insistent that

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Israel follows through with its commitments, including the removal of roadblocks announced yesterday. (A headline in Maariv reads: "Rice Demands More Concessions." Makor Rishon-Hatzofe reported that Rice was "surprised" by Israel's gestures and that she welcomed them.) Leading media reported that on Sunday the Secretary flew to Amman, where she met with King Abdullah II and PA President Mahmoud Abbas.

Ha'aretz reported on President Bush's interview with the German daily Die Welt and his statement that Israel and the Palestinians will sign an agreement before the end of his term in office. The President was quoted as saying: "This [the Palestinian state] could then immediately take shape when the conditions of the Roadmap are fulfilled. But the first step must be the clear definition of the Palestinian state. I hope it's possible. And I have an optimistic feeling that it will happen." Israel TV reported that on Sunday Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told a "top Israeli official"

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that she believes that a framework for an agreement could be reached by President Bush's planned May 14 visit to Israel.

The Jerusalem Post, citing senior defense officials, reported that Israel is considering allowing armed PA soldiers in Tulkarm and Hebron (700 such soldiers are to be deployed in Jenin next month). Major media reported on the trilateral meeting between Rice, Barak and Fayyad and the list of measures presented by Barak. Makor Rishon-Hatzofe reported that the IDF is opposed to Barak's list of good will gestures. Yediot reported that Barak warned Hizbullah and Syria against provoking Israel. Yediot reported that he told Secretary Rice that Israel is still the strongest country within a

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radius of 1,500 km from Jerusalem.

Ha'aretz reported that PM Olmert recently approved the construction of 48 new apartments in Ariel, deep inside the northern West Bank. The newspaper quoted Ehud Barak's office as saying in a statement that the new construction was meant to allow evacuated Gaza settlers, who had relocated to Ariel with the government's consent, to move from temporary to permanent housing.

Ha'aretz reported that the ultra-Orthodox United Torah Judaism (UTJ) party has for the first time joined with the Yesha Council of Jewish Settlements in the Territories in order to promote the expansion of the ultra-Orthodox settlement of Beitar Ilit, located between Jerusalem and Gush Etzion. Referring to PM Olmert's pledge to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to freeze construction in the

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settlements, UTJ MK Avraham Ravitz was quoted as saying: "Olmert must tell his rabbi, Condoleezza, 'I can't do it.'"

Ha'aretz quoted police as saying on Sunday that they had postponed today's planned opening of a new police station in the E-1 area. Internal Security Minister Avi Dichter stressed that the postponement is temporary and unrelated to Secretary Rice's visit to Israel.

The Jerusalem Post quoted Meretz MK Avshalom Vilan as saying that the Knesset vote on the proposed law to compensate West Bank settlers for relocating to within the Green Line may come sooner than thought and stands a better chance of passing than opponents believe. Vilan is a co-sponsor of the bill. Makor Rishon-Hatzofe quoted FM Livni as saying that the bill should be promoted.

Yediot and Ha'aretz reported that on Sunday, before a forum of bereaved families, Defense Minister Barak said that the current government will fall within a few months and that Olmert should have resigned following the Winograd Report. Channel 2-TV's microphones caught National Infrastructure Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer (Labor) as saying on Sunday at a government event: "If [Barak] wants to commit suicide, he can commit suicide. If he continues this way, [Labor] is finished."

Makor Rishon-Hatzofe reported that there are good chances of uniting

the right-wing religious parties.

Yediot reported that Saudi Arabia has invited rabbis from Israel to its planned interfaith conference.

Visiting Czech Defense Minister Vlasta Parkanova suggested on Sunday in an interview with Ha'aretz that a new missile-defense system that will be deployed in the Czech Republic will also contribute to Israel's defense. "If there is an effective missile defense, it will diminish the threat posed by Iran on Israel," she was quoted as saying. She will meet with her counterpart Ehud Barak today, and discuss greater defense cooperation between the two countries, and possible procurement of Israeli-made defense systems. Parkanova also told Ha'aretz that she and her colleagues support the deployment of a missile-defense system on Czech soil.

Maariv reported that the Zimbabwean opposition accuses the Mossad of acting through an Israeli high-tech company to rig the elections in favor of President Robert Mugabe.

Secretary Rice to Israel, West Bank, March 29-31, 2008:

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Summary:

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "[Foreign Minister Tzipi] Livni's calm determination is especially conspicuous when compared with the rather frenzied positions taken by Defense Minister Ehud Barak.... The U.S. administration views the policy adopted by Barak ... as a stumbling block."

Columnist Calev Ben-David wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "Barak has good reasons to be cautious, both for the safety of the Israeli people, as well as his own prime ministerial prospects if security concessions on the West Bank lead to renewed terror attacks."

Columnist Assaf Golan wrote in the nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe: "Simple logic apparently does not exist in the Kadima-led Israeli government. This cabinet might accept American involvement with open arms."

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in Ha'aretz: "Terms such as the 'general Arab interest' or 'Arab policy,' which were the showcases of previous Arab summits, were dealt a fatal blow."

Block Quotes:

I. "Livni's Perseverance"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (3/31): "The [confidential Israeli-Palestinian] talks are succeeding, despite all the difficulties, in preserving the status of the Palestinian Authority in the eyes of the public in the territories. [Foreign Minister Tzipi] Livni remains steadfast in her belief that this status, which appears to be shaky, must continue to be strengthened to prevent Hamas from gaining control of the Palestinian political arena. This is an important achievement, even if it is threatened incessantly, and it refutes the claim that 'there is no one to talk to' and enables the government to continue its dialogue with those who are legitimate representatives -- in its eyes and those of the world -- of the Palestinian people. In addition, the talks make it possible to dismantle at least some of the small stones in the fortified walls of opposition in Israeli public opinion.... Livni's calm determination is especially conspicuous when compared with the rather frenzied positions taken by Defense Minister Ehud Barak.... The U.S. administration views the policy adopted by Barak -- who also met a few times with the settlers and according to them, gave them promises that are not in accordance with the spirit of the negotiations with the Palestinians -- as a stumbling block. Livni has to cope with more than enough obstacles from the right and does not need additional interference from members of the government.

She should be allowed to get on with the job and should be supported in her efforts."

II. "Condi's Three Generals vs. Barak"

Columnist Calev Ben-David wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (3/31): "Barak's team may feel [Lt. Gen. Keith] Dayton's authority has diminished with [Gen. James] Jones and [Lt. Gen. William] Fraser on the scene; but for the latter two, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is very much a part-time gig, while it's Dayton who is on the ground here full-time, and is specifically tasked with the job - creating a viable security force -- on which any future real political progress is likely to depend, Barak has good reasons to be cautious, both for the safety of the Israeli people, as well as his own prime ministerial prospects if security concessions on the West Bank lead to renewed terror attacks (or the nightmare scenario of those weapons and APC's being given to the PA eventually falling into the hands of Hamas). But as 2008 winds in and the Bush administration presses for more progress on the Israeli-Palestinian peace front, it will be Rice's generals who will be leading the Secretary's charge for Israel to make even more concessions on the West Bank -- and Israel's own general of generals who will have to find the right balance to both keeping Washington happy, and Israelis secure."

III. "Beware, Condoleezza Is Already Here"

Columnist Assaf Golan wrote in the nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe (3/31): "The decision-makers in Jerusalem should envelop the important host [Secretary Rice] with an ocean of words of warning and state ceremonies devoid of contents. This is how most world leaders -- including in the Arab world -- deal with the Bush administration, as they await a regime change in Washington. Unfortunately, such simple logic apparently does not exist in the Kadima-led Israeli government. This cabinet might accept American involvement with open arms."

IV. "Shaky Peace Initiative"

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in Ha'aretz (3/31): "The [Arab League] summit failed to reach agreement on solutions to either the Lebanon crisis or the Palestinians' internal divisions; it did not even issue a clear statement of support for national reconciliation in Iraq. The task of dealing with the Middle East's three major crises has thus been returned to individual states or small groups of countries. The Israeli-Palestinian crisis will be handed back to Egypt and Saudi Arabia; the Lebanon crisis will be dealt with by Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Iran; and the internal Palestinian conflict will continue to be left to sporadic initiatives such as that of Yemen and Egyptian mediation. Syria might ultimately dive into this latter conflict as well: President Bashar Assad plans to convene a mini-summit of the various Palestinian factions in Damascus to try to record a personal achievement. But regardless, terms such as the 'general Arab interest' or 'Arab policy,' which were the showcases of previous Arab summits, were dealt a fatal blow. This time, the very fact that the summit occurred was the achievement, with the list of participants replacing the list of decisions as the measure of its success."

JONES